The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

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TWO JAPANESE MUSEUMS EXHIBIT CMA'S ASIAN MASTERWORKS IN FIRST MAJOR EXHIBITION ABROAD DEDICATED TO CMA'S COLLECTION

(Cleveland, OH) The Cleveland Museum of Art's reputation as one of finest collections in world took on renewed meaning as over one hundred of its Asian masterworks went on view in Japan. Entitled **Highlights of Asian Painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art**, the exhibition opened February 21 at the Nara National Museum in Nara, and will travel to the Suntory Art Museum in Tokyo in April. This marks the first time a major exhibition entirely from CMA's collection has traveled abroad. The paintings are from the CMA's famous holdings of Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Korean art.

The CMA is one of only three art museums in the West selected to participate in a Japanese-government-sponsored exhibition exchange program of Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunka-chō*) and the Japanese national museums. (Previous exchanges were between the Tokyo National Museum and the National Museum of Belgium in Brussels in 1994 and between the Kyoto National Museum and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco in 1996.)

According to CMA director Robert P. Bergman, "We are very proud to be extending to Japan our city's excellent reputation as one of America's cultural leaders. **Highlights of Asian Painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art** reinforces in a very tangible way the international significance of our collection while enhancing Cleveland's standing as a destination for cultural tourists."

The Cleveland and Nara museums have been working for four years on a trans-Pacific exchange of some of the finest Asian works of art in their collections. This summer, Cleveland will present, in turn, a rich ensemble of works including many considered by Japanese authorities to be among their country's "National Treasures," in **Buddhist Treasures from Nara**, drawn from the Nara National Museum (the principal repository of religious arts in Japan) and including art objects owned by temples and shrines throughout the country. By far

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the most significant loan of Japanese Buddhist art ever viewed outside Japan, **Buddhist Treasures from Nara** will appear *only* at CMA, from August 9 through September 27.

CMA's long history of collecting and presenting great works of art from throughout Asia, and its close relationship with colleagues at Japan's museums and at the *Bunka-chō*, give rise to this extraordinary opportunity for Japanese and American audiences alike, according to Dr. Bergman. He adds: "That an interest in the arts of Asia was incorporated into the museum's earliest statements of purpose is in itself notable, since it indicates a breadth of vision unusual for the early decades of our century. Indeed, the remarkable balance of East and West is one of the hallmarks of the museum's permanent holdings and positions it for the 21st century, predicted to be the 'Asian Century' because of the dynamism of the area's economies."

Dr. Bergman cites Cleveland-Nara connections dating back to Langdon Warner, special consultant in oriental art from about 1915 to about 1930, the only foreigner honored in burial at the Hōryū-ji, the oldest surviving Buddhist temple in the world. Warner's book on early Buddhist sculpture in Japan focused largely on Nara temple collections. CMA's painted mandala featuring Nara's pre-eminent Shinto shrine, the Kasuga Jinja, was purchased for the museum by Warner in 1916, the year CMA opened to the public; it was lent to the Nara National Museum's 100th anniversary exhibition last year.

In the post-World War II era, former CMA curator Howard Hollis served in Japan in the Arts and Monuments Division at General Douglas McArthur's general headquarters. Former CMA director and Asian art scholar Sherman E. Lee was mentored by Hollis and succeeded him in that post. CMA's relationships with Japanese institutions have also included a residency in Nara by Michael R. Cunningham, CMA curator of Japanese and Korean art, during his preparation for CMA's 75th anniversary exhibition **The Triumph of Japanese Style: 16th-Century Art in Japan** (1991-92), which featured rare loans from Japanese collections. Following **Triumph**, CMA sponsored a Nara museum curator's research trip to CMA and other U.S. museums.

The Nara National Museum specifically requested Asian paintings from Cleveland's collection for the exhibition now in Japan, and, when presented with the rich offerings available, narrowed its focus to works that celebrate the figural tradition in Asia. The resulting exhibition of one hundred paintings from the 11th-19th centuries comprises 15 Indian, 31 Chinese, 4 Korean, and 50 Japanese works. The 12th-century handscroll *Cloudy Mountains*, a rare dated painting by the Chinese master Mi Youren acquired for CMA by Howard Hollis in 1933 (Song period, AD 1130), is among the Chinese masterworks making a second trip

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back to the East for this show: it was also featured in **Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting**, a collaboration between the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and CMA, shown in Kansas City, Cleveland, and Tokyo in 1983. (**Eight Dynasties**, with about 150 CMA paintings, was the only loan in CMA's history that was larger than the current exhibition.)

The group of 50 Japanese works of art continues a CMA tradition of loans of numerous works to Japanese exhibitions, including CMA's most celebrated paintings and ceramics. Japanese loans requested for this **Highlights** exhibition include the pair of six-fold screens, *Horses and Grooms in the Stable* (Muromachi period, 1392-1573); and *White Robed Kannon* from Kōzan-ji temple (Kamakura period, 1185-1333), one of the earliest Japanese ink paintings in existence.

A catalogue for the Nara and Tokyo exhibition has been produced in Japanese by the curatorial staff at the Nara National Museum, with Kajitani Ryōji as project director; it includes an essay by Dr. Cunningham about the history and development of Cleveland's Asian collection.

Japanese authorities consider the Nara collection the most important ensemble of Japanese Buddhist art in the world. **Buddhist Treasures from Nara** will be made up of 88 of these sacred works art dating from the 7th through 15th centuries, and will be particularly rich in works from the 10th through 14th centuries, including 32 paintings, 20 sculptures, 5 works of calligraphy, and 31 objects in lacquer, metalwork, and textiles. The selection focuses on objects that helped transmit Buddhism as a new religion to Japan and demonstrates how these precedents were adapted over the centuries. A number of "National Treasures" are included in the exhibition in Cleveland, among which two have never left Japan before—mandala paintings from the 11th century in gold paint on indigo-dyed silk. Loans from temple collections in the Nara region will include the wooden sculpture of *Miroku-Nyorai*, or "future Buddha," from the Heian period (9th century). Until now, only a few works from Nara's entire holdings have been loaned to U.S. museums in recent decades.

Dr. Cunningham will oversee the publication of the catalogue for **Buddhist Treasures from Nara**, which will include essays by John Rosenfield, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University, on the history of the transformation of Buddhist objects into "art;" and Mimi Yiengpruksawan, Professor of Asian Art, Yale University, on the significance of Nara as a site in the history of Japanese Buddhism.

The opening of **Highlights of Asian Painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art** coincides with the release of the museum's new book of Asian masterworks (see accompanying release), which includes eight of the works being loaned to Japan. The exhibition's venue at the Suntory museum coincides as well

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with an Asian tour of The Cleveland Orchestra, including concerts at Tokyo's neighboring Suntory Hall. In addition to the exhibition exchange, CMA is the beneficiary of a conservation project of the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, in which an extremely rare lacquer tabernacle and three paintings are being restored in Japanese labs.

Highlights of Asian Painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art and **Buddhist Treasures from Nara** are joint projects of the Nara National Museum and the Cleveland Museum of Art, under the auspices of an exhibition exchange program of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. Major funding for the exhibitions is provided by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The exhibitions are supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, an agency of the United States government. Additional support is provided by Japan Airlines. Funding has also been provided by Audio Technica, Bridgestone/Firestone Trust Fund, Honda of America Mfg., Inc., NACCO Industries, Inc., Nishikawa Rubber Company/The Standard Products Company, and Nordson Corporation.

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